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**IDEATIONAL DISCOURSE**  
**AS TOOL OF STYLE IN OJAIDE'S "ENDLESS SONG"**  
**AND "THE DOGMA OF PATIENCE".**

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**Abstract**

This study is an investigation into the genre of poetry, a highly rated genre of literature which has an intricate linguistic composition. Poetry often deploys carefully manipulated and intoned linguistic elements in its expression. Due to its complexity, a systematic approach of interpretation that would enable readers to predict and visualize the poet's thoughts is required. It is in the light of this that this paper examines the significant stylistics highlights in selected poems of Tanure Ojaide and how these attributes contribute to an understanding of the various struggles of the people of the Niger Delta. This study adopts the ideational discourse tool of stylistics as its theoretical framework. The data for this study are two poems; "Endless Song" and "The Dogma of Patience" drawn from Ojaide's volume of poetry under the title, *The Endless Song*. In the end, the paper lays bare an intensive comprehension and meaning conveying strategy of the selected poems, taking into consideration the intoned expressions, the linguistic choices made, and the envisaged language function alongside the communication effect, facilitating an easier comprehension of the Niger Delta struggle..

**Introduction**

Tanure Ojaide is one of Nigeria's leading poets whose creative outputs straddle between the second and the third generation of poets in Nigeria. He is not only very thoughtful and concerned in terms of the various themes which he explores in his various poems *vis-à-vis* the concerns of his society but he has also evolved a unique style of expressing his thoughts in language, as many of his poems have shown. In his poems, he shows deep concerns for the fate of man in a world of endless struggles as he symbolically titles one of his collections "The Endless Song". His poems are also noted for their deep emotional involvements in the welfare of man and his society at large. He mirrors, reflects and advocates the rejection of socio-economic exploitation, violence, political disillusionment, religious decadence and social disorder in many of his poems. Some of the poems are also prescriptive as they suggest full participation of the oppressed in the

course of changing their destiny for good, as evident in the following lines from his poem “We keep watch over them” :

when we meet hardships..  
we do not break down before torturers,  
we do not surrender our hope to robbers,  
we do not groan despite the daily stabs of hunger,  
we do not give in to those who live on the blood  
of the poor or the sweat of the strong.  
Our will is the iroko tree rooted in our hearts,  
it survives whatever storm ravages us:  
we can hold to ourselves

By advocating for a resistance of the dehumanization of his people and the society at large, his actions tally with Aderemi’s description of a true poet being “the conscience of his society; ...the moral barometer of the community; ... the beacon of truth” (2012:35-36). This description of a poet is also in line with Murphy’s definition of a poet as “a person who is usually more sensitive than most to sights, sounds, and sensations of the world around him; to the behaviour of people, their follies, suffering, their nobility’.., the poet is a person who is capable of expressing these in language”(1980:21).

Ojaide’s sense of creativity, deploying the peculiarities and essences of tradition as poetic material to highlight the insensitivity that characterizes the attitude of the oppressors and other contemporary issues in his immediate and larger society, is reflected through a strong poetic language. There is, thus, the need for an intensive analysis of the creative extent of language use in some of his poems.

Riffaterre (1977:1) is of the opinion that “poetry expresses something by saying something else”. To this end, therefore, all linguistic elements which belong in linguistic categories in his poetry must be taken into consideration in specific linguistic stylistics terms. This is perhaps why Leech (1969:4) asserts that “we cannot appreciate how a poem fits together, unless we have first found the means to take it to pieces”. This “means” is a linguistic stylistic tool that helps to deduce the chain of linguistic elements embellished in poems for better comprehension and for meaning conveying purposes.

Wales (1989:438) describes the term, linguistic stylistics, to be “stylistics analysis that entails rigorous application of linguistic tools in the study of texts”. In the same vein, Raymond (1973:11) views stylistics as “the linguistic study of different styles...” while Kirsten (1991:38) describes stylistics to be “the study of style in spoken and written text”. Therefore, the means to study and analyze the linguistic elements in a text is situated within the threshold of style. Style is then defined by Enkvist (1964:11) as “an active principle of composition by which the writer penetrates and reveals the inner form of his subject”. Hence, style could be viewed as the language habit of a writer and other striking and significant

linguistic features deliberately employed by a writer in the process of message communication.

This paper examines the deployment of ideational features in Ojaide's "Endless Song" and "The Dogma of Patience" in his collection, *The Endless Song*. Ideational features refer to a significant metafunctional discourse that exploits stylistic elements in a body of works. Through this discourse, we intend to investigate how the poet has been able to interrogate socio-political concerns in the Niger Delta region of the Nigerian nation.

### **Theoretical Consideration**

For an intensive discussion on the level of language use in the selected poems, an analysis of the poems will be considered from ideational discourse perspective. This is based on the comprehension and assumption of systemic linguistics that there is a correlation between language function and language structure. Haynes (1987: 11) explains and describes a discourse as "the level of meanings, sub-divided into layers" These layers are "Ideational, Interpersonal, Textual". Each of these three metafunctions of language aims at the same goal of meaning sharing potential of any literary text.

In respect to ideational meaning potential of a text, Halliday considers "its role as a means of representing patterns of experience" (1985:101). This meaning can be obtained through an analysis of how the participants in the clause function. Such participants include *Act* (representing the logical subject of traditional grammar), *Goal* (representing object), and others like *Carrier*, *Attribute*, *Circumstance*, *Senser*, *Phenomenon*, *Behaver*, and *Sayer* which relate to the process of the clause in transitivity terms. The clause, as representation, can further be perceived from five levels or layers. These are material clause, mental process clause, relational process clause, behavioural and verbal process clauses. Each of these will be explained as it occurs in our analysis. The two poems selected for analysis in this study will be considered from this perspective as dictated by their graphological and lexico-syntactic choices.

### **Stylistic Resources in "Endless Song" and "The Dogma of Patience"**

#### ***Material Process Clauses:***

Halliday (1973:103) describes material process clauses as "processes of doing which express the notion that some entity does something which may be done to some other entity". Incidentally, the first line sentence of the poem "Endless song", 'I traverse the earth with a feather' illustrates this clause type. It is also important to recognize this same line as a relational process clause which Halliday (1973:111) describes as "those of being". In this case, the "I" in "I traverse the earth with a feather" becomes interpreted as related to "the earth" through the shared property, "a feather". The interpretation of the first line

sentence will help in emphasizing the bond between the poet and the earth with its human and non-human phenomenon. The following additional examples of material process clauses from the poem further illustrate this relationship:

I count it a blessing	line 3
I celebrate with them	line 17
I thirst for that draught	line 20
And I traverse the earth with a feather	line 22

The above sample material process clauses reveal the nature of some of the participants (Actor, Goal, etc.) in the poem. In all the four instances where the poet-persona is represented by “I” as Actor, the first illustration relates to human beings while the remaining three are of inanimate phenomena—“blessing”, “draught” and “earth”. The poet’s diction highlights his adroit use of imagery. Words like “stone-path”, “a fresh pitch”, “my feet”, “wanderer’s eyes”, “long road”, “journey”, “the sea”, “the bush”, and so on, convey the impression of one travelling and wandering aimlessly from place to place. Such expressions also emphasize the fate and travails of man in the course of his sojourn on the planet earth. The poem, “Endless Song” goes on to show the poet-persona as one who is making laborious efforts through life and who, ultimately is “falling” and “rising” (line 2), “bruising...feet on the stone-path”(line 4), without giving in to fears that are associated with the nights; “night bothers not (his) feet” (line 8) as well as “...with longing” (line 19) and “thirst” (line 20) for that “draught” (line 20), “on the ...long road through frontiers”. These abstractions aside a depiction of the travails, longings and quests of man for knowledge and an attainment in a particular line of inquiry, also portrays the poet-persona as a very determined person as evident in line 8 “night bothers not my feet”. We, therefore, see that in the poet’s sojourn through the earth, a mutual impact is being created. Thus, while he witnesses the pathetic conditions of both human and non-human phenomena through his survey, the poet acquires knowledge from everything he sees and comes in contact with, as evident in the following lines:

The palm bows to the wind.	Line 9
What turns on the eagle in its high nest	line 11
Lights up the wanderer’s eyes	line 12

It becomes pellucid from the above lines that man must learn to succumb to certain supreme and superior forces of nature like “the palm” that “bows” to the supremacy of “the wind”.

The eagle’s action also awakens the inert ability of man to certain phenomenon in his environment. This action is captured in this line, “lights up...” . The “eagle” is also an element functioning as Actor in the poem, and it is associated with the poet’s agents of civilization and enlightenment.

In the poem, “The Dogma of Patience”, the elements which serve as Actor in the poem include: “our lives”, “ourselves”, “we”, “these days”, “wanderers”, “wailers”, “their”, “us”, “our hands”, and so on. These conflated Actors, therefore, become collective victims of endless lack, patience and waiting, hoping for a better life as they wandered into a “...new road” (line13). The only abstract noun functioning as Actor, “these days...” (line 8) is modified with “brightly”, thus elevating it to the status of “draped idols” who conjure humility. In essence, therefore, all the elements functioning as Actor in the poem are those associated with travails and wailings of man. Accordingly, their activities include, “respite in patience”, “pain”, “sacrifice”, “misery”, “offering”, “sweat in place of bull’s blood”, “stoked by the same waiting”, “hunger biting us”, “lose their tiredness in a new road”, and so on. All these convey the impression of lamentations, wailings and travails of man. The diction and the reflections are those of the travails of man.

“The Dogma of Patience” is similar to “Endless Song” in terms of thematic consideration. One of the differences, however, is that while “Endless song” presents a picture of the struggle and fate of man in an attempt to come out of himself, understand and learn more about how things function in his world so as to become a successful being, “The Dogma of Patience” reflects on starvation, deprivation, and emphasizes on an aspect of siege—a paradoxical movement of man to really nowhere in search of a new means of livelihood as he is tired of waiting in one place patiently and continues to hope for what is not forthcoming, as evident in the following lines:

Dampened, then stoked by the same waiting,	line 12
Wanderers lose their tiredness in a new road	line 13
Where wailers will be restituted for past tears.	line 14

“The dogma of patience” employs the devices of symbolism and passive voice. Hence, we find symbols such as, “wandering paths”, “sacrifice”, “bull’s gift”, “the cash”, “draped idols”, “gods”, “tears”, “drinks”, “sweat”, “blood”, “new road”, “peel”, “god sent yams”, “hunger”, “feast”, “days”, and so on. All the above highlight and stand for the socio-economic problems of contemporary society.

#### ***Mental Process Clauses:***

Halliday (1973:1061) defines this sub-type of clauses as “those involving the Senser (equivalent of Actor) in the acts of feeling, thinking, knowing and perceiving”. Thus, mental processes show specific impact on the senses of the poet as they portray the relationship between physical and mental movement of the poet in the situations he sees and finds himself as he traverses the earth. Some examples of the mental process clauses in the poem, “Endless song” are as follows:

I traverse the earth with a feather	line 1
Talisman, falling and rising.	Line 2
I count it a blessing,	line 3
And the song keeps me fit.	Line 7
The palm bows to the wind.	Line 9
What propels the wind to sing...	line 10
Lights up the wanderer's eyes	line 12
Or the cat, vexed with domesticity,	line 16
I celebrate with them	line 18
Their zestful meeting with longing	line 19
I thirst for that draught	line 20
That will fill me boundless joy.	Line 21

In “The Dogma of Patience”, the mental process clauses show the endless stretching of the misery which becomes coeval with, and an index of frustration and anxiety which the “wanderers” and the “wailers” undergo, as evident in the following lines:

Asked to sacrifice to lift ourselves	line 4
From the depth of misery, we have	line 5
Neither the luck of a bull gift	line 6
Nor the cash to buy a rare offering.	line 7

Therefore, from all the above instances abstracted from the poem, the experiences of the wanderers and wailers can be summarized as people whose senses and psyche are filled with lack of the means and will power to change their situations. Besides, there is the perilous condition of “... hunger biting us” (line 16). Hence, there is a multi-pronged trauma which results from the lack, endless patience and the daily psychological shock arising from the events witnessed by these wanderers and wailers. The summation of the tired wanderers and wailers seems to come in the mental process clause only in the poem;

Dampened, then stoked by the same waiting,	line 12
Wanderers lose their tiredness in a new road	line 13
Where wailers will be restituted for past tears	line 14

Here, the Senser is dropped from the clause through choice of passive voice. In physical consideration, the absence of the Senser implies that the wanderers and the wailers are social nonentities. Thus, neither the public nor any human rights activists know about their conditions, hence, portraying how completely at the mercy of starvation they were. The poem, “The Dogma of Patience” evokes, therefore, a picture of psychological and physical state of typical victims of socio-economic deprivation and disillusionment.



***Relational Process Clauses:***

Halliday describes relational process clauses as “those of being” (1973:111). He further explains that relational process clauses are sub-divided into various types which include “attributive, identifying, circumstantial and possessive” (Halliday, 1973:114). Some of these features in the poem “Endless Song” are extracted and indicated as follows:

...falling and rising	circumstance
Bruising my feet ...	circumstance
My blood is inseparable from my voice	identifying
I celebrate with them	identifying
...fill me with boundless joy	attributive
The eagle in its high nest	attributive
The palm bows to the wind	circumstance
Lights up the wanderer's eyes	identifying
I thirst for that draught	attributive
Their zestful meeting with longing	attributive
Night bothers not my feet	circumstance

The above examples of relational clauses represent the travails and fate of man as he traverses the earth. The deep longing and quest of man to partake in what will occasion change in his life also feature as one other clause type in the poem. This clause type is the behavioural process category and it relates mainly to involuntary actions. In “The Dogma of Patience”, the behavioural process category appears as the poet’s only form of reaction; “I thirst for that draught that will fill me with boundless joy” (lines 20-21 of “Endless Song”), and the other is the poet’s own reaction to various situations in the course of his sojourn on earth, “...I traverse the earth with a feather, talisman, falling and rising” (lines 22-23 of “Endless Song”). The predominant instances of the Actor in the poem are: “I” (5 times as featured in lines 1,3, 118, 20, and 22), “my feet” (2 times in lines 4 and 8), “my blood” (line 6), “my voice” (line 6), “the palm” (line 9), “the wind” (line 10), “the wanderer’s eyes” (line 12), “the eagle” (line 12), “the boa” (line 14), “the cat” (line 16), “their” (line 19), “me” (2 times in lines 7 and 21). Eight of these occurrences constitute the only human forms of the Actor in the poem. The remaining ones are the non-human forms and some parts of the human body which are also classified as non-human things. They include “feet, blood, voice, palm, wind, wanderer’s eyes, eagle, boa, and cat”. In the poem, the employment of the personal pronoun, “I” makes the Actor completely integrated in the sojourner and “their” as co-sojourners. The repeated use of the first person pronoun, “I”, has also served as a device to circumvent the compulsive use of the passive voice to facilitate Actor-deletion. As a result, only in the lines, 18-19, “I celebrate with them their zestful meeting with longing”, do we have a syntactic choice employed to facilitate dropping of Actor.

Ojaide's "Endless Song" fully and patently mirrors, portrays and captures agents of misery and anguish as storms to be weathered, managed and endured by man as he forges ahead in the course of his sojourn through life. This is evident in this line; "bruising my feet on the stone- path" (line 4). Also, the Actor does not consider himself in danger of a non-human thing as embedded in the clause; "night bothers not my feet " (line 8). "Night", here, symbolizes two things; time and circumstance. Night symbolizes Time in the sense that night is a period for man to rest from work. It is also a period for the manifestation of evil as it is under the cover of night that most evil doers carry out their nefarious activities. On the other hand, Circumstance represents the travails of man. The overwhelming dominance of movement elements in the poem "Endless Song" reflects the paradox of time, survey and adventure being the echoes that envelope the fate and travails of man in quest of knowledge, enlightenment and civilization.

Halliday (1973: 114) submits that attributive mode is one "in which some qualitative attribute is assigned to a carrier". In this case, the poem, "The Dogma of Patience" has the following lines as an attributive relational process clause:

..., our lives have been wandering paths,	
almost ending in the morass of pain	lines 1-3
Asked to sacrifice to lift ourselves from the	
depth of misery,...	lines 4-5
Wash our hands clean before the feast.	line 17

In all the clauses, the carrier is the same; "our", a pronoun, is followed metaphorically by the noun phrases "wandering paths" and "depth of misery" while "the feast" featured in lines 1-3,4-5 and 17 of "The Dogma of Patience". These noun phrases help to place emphasis on the significance of the consequent traumatization of the wanderers and the wailers. This same traumatization can also be seen in the following lines:

...we have neither the luck of a bull gift	lines 5-6
Nor the cash to buy the rare offering.	line 7
And these days of brightly draped idols,	line 8
There are no gods contented with humility	line 9
To accept tears in place of drinks	line 10
Or sweat in place of bull's blood.	line 11

Reading carefully through the lines, there is noticeably, an emotional outburst reflected in the weeping, wailing, moaning and grinding of teeth from the wanderers and the wailers. The poet tears off the veil of suppressed anguish and patience as the victims lament their precarious situations. The "brightly draped idols" refers to those who have idolized themselves as demi-gods, thereby seeking gratification from helpless victims before rendering any assistance. The attributes of the carrier from the above lines could be seen as social injustice, aside the



travails of the wanderers except for the variation in the modification of each occurrence of the attribute.

Elements relating to travails predominate in the poem. The constellation of images relating to travails and social injustices are: “patience”, “wandering paths”, “pain”, “sacrifice”, “misery”, “luck”, “cash”, “offering”, “brightly draped idols”, “gods”, “tears”, “drinks”, “sweat”, “blood”, “tiredness”, “new road”, “peel”, “god sent yams”, “hunger”, “hands” and “feast”. All these images already give a mental picture of the situation which the poem seeks to portray. A traditional adverbial clause of place is also used in line 14 “where wailers will be restituted for past-tears”.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has examined two of Ojaide’s poems from the collection, *The Endless Song*, from the perspective of ideational discourse as tool of style in language. The study viewed Ojaide as a protesting voice against those who have constituted and entrenched themselves as demi-gods seeking for gratification before giving civic assistance to helpless victims in our society. This is reflected in the selected poems under critical searchlight.

The dominant stylistic trends of the poet are presented through features emerging from the creative manipulation of the core linguistic components including the use of graphology to enhance meaning. The study has also attempted to unveil the dominant social visions and stylistic preferences and characteristics of the poet.

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